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InFocus...

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EXCERPT

North Korea's Underestimated Military Power

After the recent setbacks to free world and US interests in Iran, Afghanistan, and Africa, Congress seems bent on cooling the Administration's ardor for withdrawing US ground troops from South Korea. In a speech on the House floor, Rep. Samuel E. Stratton (D-N. Y.), for instance, asked about public allegations that the Korean troop-withdrawal plan also called for removing US tactical nuclear weapons from that country and replacing them with dummy warheads. He asserted that "... we cannot countenance any strategic plan [that] could increase the risk of war [and that is] being carried out deliberately in a way that would bypass the Congress and the constitutional requirements of our government." The Administration has not yet responded to Mr. Stratton's request for information on that issue.

In Senate Armed Services Committee hearings, meanwhile, the Commander in Chief of the United Nations Command in Korea, Army Gen. John W. Vessey, testified that "North Korea has a much larger and better-equipped military force than

had been previously believed. Before this most recent reassessment, which has yet to be ... concluded by the intelligence community, we credited the North Koreans with a two-to-one advantage in tanks, artillery, and tactical aircraft. We thought they had a four-to-one advantage in naval combatants, including a three-to-one advantage in missile-attack craft. We now believe that the North is much stronger in artillery, tanks, and overall combat capability than was estimated a year ago." General Vessey also disclosed that "there may be some difficulty" in the ROK Army's ability to operate all the weapon systems that it was to take over from the departing US Army under the Administration's original schedule.

Even though he declined to speculate about North Korea's intentions, General Vessey told the Senate that "the nature of the North's deployments, its available weaponry, and the sheer number of its units justifies the perception of offensive intent. It is clear that this force has the ability to launch a major invasion of the ROK with little warning. Unequivocal evidence of the North's aggressive posture is found in its active clandestine infiltration of the South by sea and by land, and its unrelenting burrowing of tunnels under the DMZ [demilitarized zone]. On

17 October 1978, United Nations Command counter-tunnel operations exposed a third North Korean tunnel, dug deep under the military demarcation line and well into the southern DMZ. Detection devices indicate that more tunnels are being dug. These tunnels represent clear violations of the Armistice agreement. They serve no purpose other than surprise attack at a time advantageous to the North."

The White House has now indicated that the Administration will exercise caution in further withdrawal of US ground forces from South Korea, at least until the belated intelligence assessment is completed.

Washington Observations

- On February 20 of this year the Central Intelligence Agency—represented by four senior officials—was to furnish the R&D Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee with a full, unabridged briefing on a CIA study of Soviet deceptions prior to, during, and after SALT I. This so-called Sullivan study—named for its principal au-

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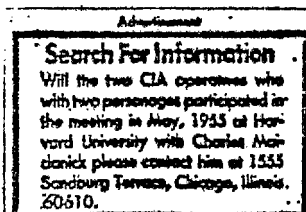
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